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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2968
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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 1189
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RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 3641
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 002443

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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [AMED](#) [AMGT](#) [CASC](#) [EAGR](#) [PINR](#) [KFLU](#) [CH](#) [HK](#)
SUBJECT: HONG KONG RESTRICTS POULTRY IMPORTS FOLLOWING
SOUTH CHINA H5N1 OUTBREAK

REF: GUANGZHOU 1048

11. (SBU) Summary. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) suspended all imports of live poultry and birds, chicks, eggs, and meat originating from the Panyu District, Guangdong Province, Southern China following the confirmation of an H5N1 virus outbreak in Panyu duck farms. HKSARG immediately announced eight precautionary measures, including, banning poultry products from farms within a 24km radius of the outbreak epicenter in Panyu District for a three-week period, and suspending duck and goose meat and egg imports from the entire Guangdong Province for one week. Hong Kong's planned expanded import of 70,000 live chickens for the September 25 Mid-Autumn Festival have been canceled (daily imports are normally capped at 20,000 birds). Joint inspection and daily consultations highlight Hong Kong and Guangdong Province cooperation efforts in response to the outbreak. The HKSARG reports that no H5N1 has been detected within its borders. HKSARG Food and Health Secretary York Chow believes the Panyu incident to be

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isolated, but notes that changes in conditions would lead to adjustments in HKSARG's response. Hong Kong University's Professor Guan Yi says this outbreak is "an occasional event" and "no big issue," despite broad media attention. End Summary.

12. (U) On September 17, the HKSARG announced eight precautionary measures to protect public health following PRC Ministry of Agriculture confirmation of an outbreak of H5N1 virus in Guangdong Province, Panyu District's duck farms. These measures include:
--Immediate suspension of imports of all live poultry and birds, poultry eggs, and chilled and frozen meat from all farms within a 24km radius of Xinzao, the city at the outbreak center in Panyu District, for 21 days.
--Immediate suspension of imports of chilled and frozen ducks and geese, and duck and goose eggs from Guangdong Province, for one week.
--Daily communication with the mainland Ministry of Agriculture and the Guangdong Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau (GDCIQ) to understand the progress of the epidemic and control measures underway.
--Cancellation of 70,000 live chicken imports from the Mainland for the Mid-Autumn Festival (September 25).

--Enhanced inspection and surveillance of hygiene conditions in all local live poultry farms, as well as wholesale and retail markets by the FEHD and the Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD).
--Deterrence of illegal import of poultry and birds to Hong Kong by AFCD, FEHD, Customs and Excise Department, the Police, and their mainland counterparts, to prevent an increase in the risk of avian influenza outbreak brought in by poultry and birds that have not undergone inspection and quarantine.
--Broadcast health messages at immigration control points and distribution of health advice leaflets.

13. (U) HKSARG's September 17 precautionary measures differ from the HKSARG's standard outbreak response that would have banned all poultry imports from the entire Guangdong Province for a three-month period. Secretary for Food and Health York Chow explained that FEHD revised its procedures, since it believes that the outbreak is an isolated incident, with no new outbreak findings since the September 14 cull, and the fact that ducks are a natural host of H5N1. (Note: Professor Joseph Sung, Director of the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases, Chinese University of Hong Kong, commented that it was rare to see an outbreak of H5N1 among ducks because the immunity system of ducks is different from that of chickens. Ducks will carry the virus and will usually not die when infected by avian influenza. He did not rule out that the virus may have mutated. End note.) As a precaution, Secretary Chow noted that the quarantine area has been

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established at three times the international practice of 8km.

14. (U) Hong Kong's AFCD is stepping up its monitoring of local farms, with an average daily production of 25,000 birds, and warned farmers to take safety measures seriously, while Secretary Chow is encouraging the public "not to worry

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too much, but to stay alert and observe good personal and environmental hygiene."

15. (U) In response to government actions to date, The H5N1 Concern Group, a Hong Kong-based pressure group, is urging the HKSARG to "ban all live poultry from the mainland for 21 days, or in particular from the entire Guangdong Province." Group leader, Dr. Lo Wing-lok said, "Because the situation is so serious, so unclear, the government cannot define the scale of the problem," and this calls for more stringent measures.

16. (SBU) Professor Guan Yi, Director, State Laboratory of Infectious Diseases at Hong Kong University, canceled his trip to the U.S. this week to monitor this outbreak. He indicated that this outbreak was not so unusual but media attention had raised public concerns. He went on to say that there is "no need to be over-sensitive" regarding this event, that it did not appear that the H5N1 virus had mutated, and it was "no big issue." He committed to updating post promptly should the situation change. AFCD Assistant Director for Inspection and Quarantine, Dr. Thomas Sit, said these outbreaks "are a fact of life, especially in waterfowl," and conveyed every confidence in the HKSARG ability to manage the situation.

17. (SBU) There are 94 registered poultry farms in Guangdong Province supplying live poultry to Hong Kong, of which twenty are affected by the precautionary measures. Despite the relatively limited impact on supply, FAS Attache reports that wholesale prices for chicken have jumped approximately 18 percent in the last two days.

Macau Suspends Imports

18. (U) The Macau Special Administrative Region Government

(MSARG) announced on September 18 a ban on the import of poultry and related products from the area within 8km of Panyu District for the next 21 days. Currently, Macau does not import any products from the outbreak region, only importing from other parts of Guangdong Province (Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Hubei and Doumen), their poultry supply will remain constant. Mr. Neng Peng-in, member of the Board of Governors at the Macau Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau, indicated that the Bureau had hired experts from overseas to conduct tests on migratory birds and poultry sold in the marketplace over the last eight months. The results showed no avian influenza virus.

Cunningham